

# Michigan Woodcock Banders Newsletter

August 2008  
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***This Newsletter is Dedicated  
in Memory of:***

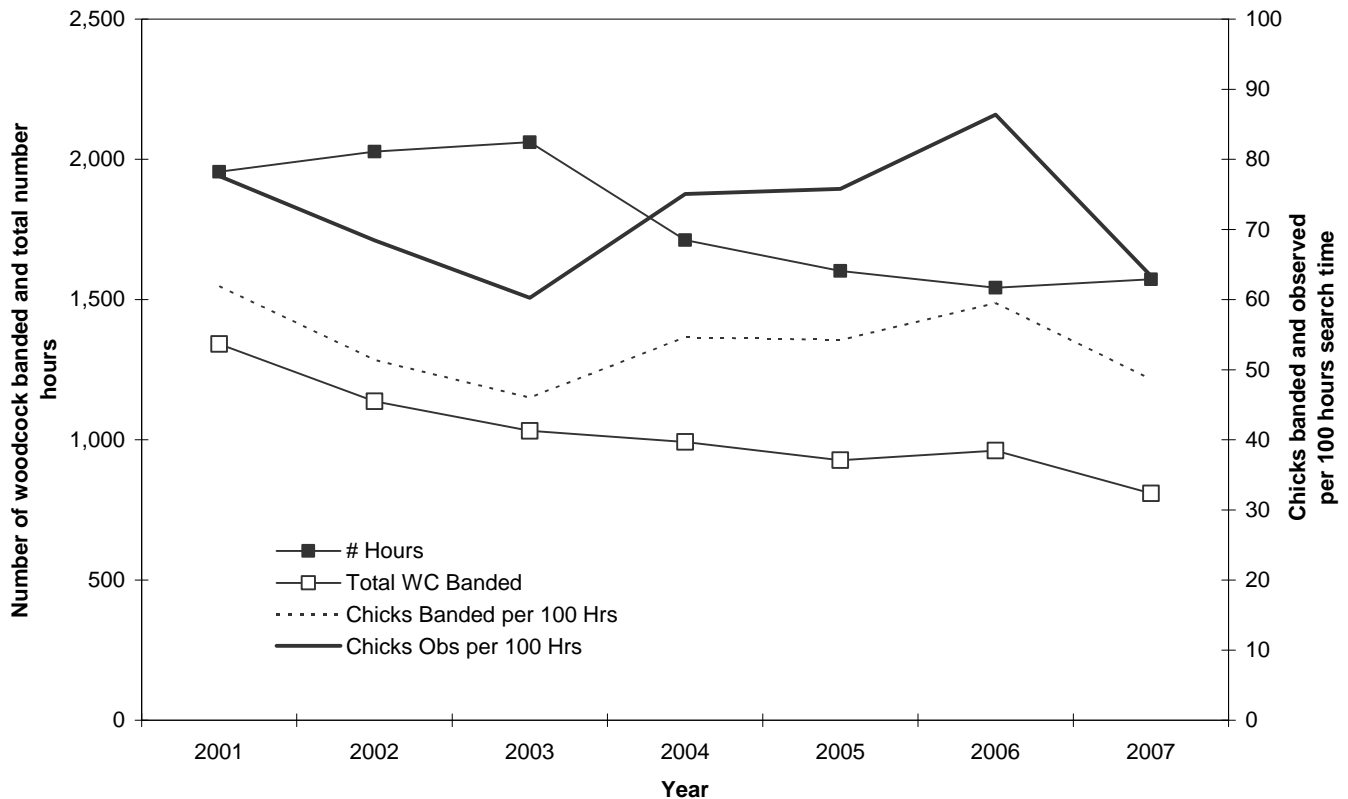
**Dr. George Andrew (Andy) Ammann, Sr.  
1910-2008**

Dr. George Andrew (Andy) Ammann, Sr. (cover of newsletter) was born in Philadelphia and grew up in rural New Jersey where he developed a love of nature, especially birds. He received B.A. and M.S. degrees in zoology from the University of Iowa in 1933 and a Ph.D. at the University of Michigan in 1938, researching the life history of the Yellow-headed Blackbird. After two years with the Fish and Wildlife Service and two with the U.S. Army, he was hired as a game biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in 1944. His responsibilities included all species of grouse (Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-tailed grouse, Spruce Grouse, and Prairie Chicken) as well as woodcock and snipe. Years ago, new biologists in Michigan were encouraged to own a dog. This was exactly what Andy wanted to hear. Andy loved his dogs and was well known and respected for the breeding and training of bird dogs. "Woodcock seemed to be a neglected species," he said "I saw the potential of the resource and how it wasn't being looked at seriously." He wanted to change that. Andy discovered that pointing dogs could be used to help gather basic information about woodcock. He wrote, *A Guide to Capturing and Banding American Woodcock Using Pointing Dogs*, published by the Ruffed Grouse Society, which describes the methods and techniques of capturing and banding woodcock. Over 35,000 woodcock have been banded in Michigan using this technique. He was the author of numerous research articles and books. Andy retired in 1974 from the Michigan DNR, and remained active in game bird investigations and hunting, especially banding woodcock until about 2000. He made a friend out of everyone, and never met a stranger. Andy died May 22, 2008 at age 98. He is missed by family and friends.

*By John Urbain, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Retired*



## Michigan Woodcock Banding Data, 2001-2007



Number of woodcock banded, hours spent banding, and number of woodcock chicks banded and observed per 100 hours of search time in Michigan, 2001-2007.

### 2007 Banding Summary

In 2007, Michigan woodcock banders spent approximately 1,600 hours searching for broods. These efforts resulted in 327 located broods, 764 banded chicks, and 45 banded hens. The average brood size observed was 3; the average brood size was 3.1 in 2006. There were 62.4 chicks observed and 48.6 chicks banded per 100 hours of search time, compared to 86.4 observed and 59.4 banded in 2006.



### 2009 Mandatory Training Session

Mark your calendar! The next mandatory training session will be held on **April 4, 2009**. An application form will be sent to banders in January and it will include additional details. Future training sessions will be held in odd-numbered years on the Saturday closest to April 1.

## **Michigan Hosts Woodcock Symposium**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources hosted the Tenth American Woodcock Symposium at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center near Grayling, Michigan, on October 3 – 6, 2006. Every few years, the scientific woodcock community hosts this symposium to highlight recent research on American woodcock. It represents an opportunity for presentation of results from research projects completed throughout the woodcock's range in recent years.

The Tenth Symposium brought together researchers, land managers, biologists, hunters and woodcock enthusiasts to discuss and report current information on the ecology and management of the species, share ideas on the future of woodcock research and management efforts, and talk about "hot topics" in the woodcock world.

The previous woodcock symposia have effectively fostered communication of

woodcock research and have proved to be the foundation for successful woodcock management internationally. Past symposia have been held across the range of the species, in Minnesota (1966), Louisiana (1968 and 1997), Maine (1969), Michigan (1971), Georgia (1974), New Brunswick (1977), Pennsylvania (1980), and Indiana (1990). With each symposium, the quality of data, sophistication of statistical analysis, and originality of methods take a giant step forward.

Biologists and other woodcock enthusiasts from 23 states and four countries participated in the meeting. Results from survey evaluations indicated that attendees were impressed by the symposium, enjoyed the professional experience, and learned significant information about woodcock and Michigan.

All manuscripts presented at the symposium are being peer-reviewed and will be published next spring in a book chapter format.

### **Number of hours woodcock banders spent searching for broods, 2007.**

Bander	# Hours	Bander	# Hours	Bander	# Hours
Charles Riley	71	Tony Bonito	30	Rick DeJager	16
Randy Strouse	65	Greg Block	30	Jerry McDevitt	16
Ed Feys	65	George Najor	27	Bob Paulson	16
Greg Hortze	65	Don Hockey	26	Donald Zelenka	16
Larry Kanitz	65	Stanley Strugala	26	Mark Rentschler	15
Paul Baird	60	Al Huff	25	Mel Disselkoen	15
Harry Waters	56	Gregg Kabacinski	24	Roland Metcalf	15
Al Lowrie	54	Harold Weiss	24	Mark Warner	15
Charles Rose	45	Roger Moore	23	Jim Sixberry	15
J. Michael Oostmeyer	45	Andrew Nuhfer	22	Andy Tingstad	14
Ken Mohler	39	Lou Adams	22	Keith Rich	12
Sheldon McBurney	38	Ralph Ordiway	21	John Wyman	12
Joe Carney	38	David Prawdzik	20	Michael LeMasters	11
Gary Thompson	37	Sally Downer	19	Martha Kaufman	10
Jerrie Schultz	36	Bob Snyder	19	Judy Flynn	9
Leann Parnell	34	Paul Tutro	19	Stephen Winkler	9
Russ Hubbard	34	Tom Prawdzik	18	Rich Sajdak	9
Craig Kelly	33	Dave Fletcher	18	Edward Caveney	6
Ken Ide	32	Paul Keiswetter	17	Michael Conley	5

## **Woodcock Banders' Field Notes**

### **Summary by Sally Downer**

Hmmmm! Weather and gas prices were the most frequent topics of discussion in the Banders' field notes! Two frustrating subjects, for sure! Let's take a closer look.

The "gas price" topic is probably a bit too political for further discussion and debate in this newsletter. My personal strategy has been simple: I have a piggy bank and I have been putting my pennies (oops, I mean dollars) in it since last May in preparation for this coming May. Then, I think I will just go camp where I plan go band rather than go back and forth to home each day. Then, I think my next car will not be a lovely 4WD extended cab truck like I enjoy now, but rather something more fuel efficient – of course, that's several years off in view of the price of an automobile these days. Enough! The bottom line for me is that I truly have a passion for Woodcock banding and I will do just about anything to get to go!

Weather is also a frustrating topic of which we have no control, but then neither do the Woodcock. It is always fascinating to me what a hen Woodcock will endure just to experience motherhood each year. OK, the males endure the weather too!

Factor 1: according to the field notes, for 2007, almost all areas of Michigan received snow during the first week of April. As you probably recall, Easter (April 8, 2007) was cold and the ground was covered with snow – lots of it! Andy Tingstat reported 25-30 inches during the first week of April at his home in the UP – now, that's a lot! Northern Michigan was pretty well covered with a good 6-8 inches. Parts of Lower Michigan received snow in lesser but significant, quantities. Keep in mind that early April is typically the peak nesting time for Woodcock.

Factor 2: in many areas of Michigan the snow during this first week of April, 2007, lasted for approximately 6-8 days. The snow during the



peak nesting time in many areas of Michigan was deep and it lasted for a long time: Andy always taught me that the Woodcock world, this is the combination that *can* be treacherous to some nests and *especially* to young broods! *Note: Here's where I wish I had the hatch dates and brood sizes of all the broods banded this year cuz it would give a bit of scientific data to report – versus speculation. We can come back to this topic later.* Let's look at what some banders had to say, in the notes from last spring.

**Sheldon** (Osceola Co.) reported 5" wet, heavy snow starting on April 5 with some melt off by the 11<sup>th</sup>, but then further accumulations of 6-8" on the 12<sup>th</sup> which lasted until April 15. He also had a friend who accidentally stepped on a Woodcock nest while in the woods on April 11; the friend reported to Sheldon that the chicks were fairly well formed. As Sheldon noted, the hen would have been nesting though about 5" of wet, heavy snow from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>. Interesting, isn't it? Sheldon also noted, however, he felt the lasting snow did hurt some of the nesters. *Your notes and observations were tremendous, Sheldon!*

**Tom Prawdzik** (Clare, Gladwin, Osceola) noted 2-7" wet snow April 11-13<sup>th</sup> in Central Michigan where the woods were also full of standing water. He felt some of the nests withstood the weather. For example, he banded a 6 day old brood on April 30 which would have hatched on April 24 meaning that the hen was on the nest in early April during the snow and cold. He also banded one chick of an 18 day old brood on May 8; again, it would have hatched April 20 and, yes, the nest made it through the bad weather too. *Tom, thanks for adding the brood ages to your notes as it added fact to our speculations.*

**Greg Hortze** adds the following observation: "Hens with chicks on the ground lost part of the brood due to the hen's inability to sufficiently warm all her chicks for the

prolonged cold spell. Partial broods of 1 or 2 chicks were the norm rather than the exception."

**Gregg Kabacinski** (Tuscola, Lake, Montmorency, Oscoda, Crawford, Roscommon) found the average peak hatch of his broods to be May 10-13 which is later than usual.

**Russ Hubbard** believes the weather took a toll on the Woodcock during the 2007 nesting/brooding season. He has been banding for 22 years and felt it was the worst ever.

**Don Hocky** (Kalkaska) also felt it was his worst year due to the weather. He reported 12-15" snow in Antrim and Kalkaska Co.

**Rick DeJager** (Ottawa and Mid Michigan) found flying broods mid May suggesting a pretty normal hatch in that area.

**Charles Riley** (Southern and Mid Michigan) included the brood age of his banded birds. This was helpful in determining some interesting data. In Southern Michigan, the broods that Charles found hatched between April 13 and May 1 with most right around April 19 which is pretty normal. The broods from Mid Michigan counties, however, hatched between April 29 and May 20 with most around May 14 which is late compared to most years. He did not report flying broods in the latter area.

My experience (Grand Traverse, Wexford) was definitely interesting. In view of snow depth (6-8") and heavy consistency (wet, heavy) and the length of time (1 week) it was on the ground, I decided to focus on some tried and true areas. I wanted to check the areas repeatedly over a period of time so that I would have a good knowledge of what happened in each area over the entire banding season. I was simply curious about what the effects of the unusual weather would be on the Woodcock. Here is my own story. I



banded throughout the month of May with the heaviest emphasis on the last 2 weeks. I feel I had a pretty good year considering some usual limiting factors. I spent about 20 actual hunting, on the ground, searching for brood hours (doesn't include anything like pre-season, exploring new cover, etc.). Early May was filled with solid work only on males and grouse. All of the broods I found hatched between May 11 and 18 (very late hatch). I did not find any flying broods and I banded through out the month – very unusual. All of my broods except on were 4 chick broods; the one that wasn't had 3 chicks. I found my broods in two very concentrated areas; these two areas were about ¾ mi in diameter each and were areas that were pretty high and dry and the late snow melted here first. I wish I could have banded into June because I believe I would have found more bandable broods.

Well, what's your conclusion? It seems to me that Andy, as usual, is right. Remember that hen on a nest will typically (although not always) re-nest if driven from one nest by weather or other factors. Many of us in the more northern areas, including myself, found this to be true. Our nesting time is a bit later so many of our hens were nesting rather than brooding. We had a larger hatch peak, suggesting that many of the hens abandoned the first nest during the inclement weather only to re-nest later and hatch a brood. A hen with chicks, on the other hand has a true life threatening challenge. It is very difficult for a hen to keep herself and her chicks warm, fed and healthy if they are on the ground during the type of weather that presented during the first week of April 2007. the notes from banders in the middle and lower parts of the state were more mixed; some found broods that were reduced in size during their normal banding times suggesting that some of the broods that were on the ground during the weather were in the right spot at the right time and were able to survive at least a partial brood. Some hen sat through and hatched a full brood. It sounds like there were also some

re-nesting in those areas based on banders' observations as well. I still would like to know what was happening during early June in all areas, especially the northern lower and UP; the question being, did we have a lot of re-nesting, thus a successful Woodcock production year after all or not?

Compliments to all for the informative field notes. It seems that all are taking time to record important information. In a never ending attempt toward continuous improvement (can't you tell I work in the health field?), I would like to invite suggestions for field not topics in the future. One piece of information that would be helpful is the addition of each broods' hatch date. It would be easy to make a note of it just to the right of the column entitled "Dog Hours Afield."

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to all of the active woodcock banders who take the time to help band woodcock chicks every spring. Anna Hamilton assisted with the layout of this newsletter. Sally Downer summarized the banders' field notes. She pulled out some interesting items to include in this newsletter. Dave Fletcher has offered to print this electronic newsletter for any bander who does not have access to a computer. Please contact Al Stewart or Valerie Frawley to make arrangements. John Urbain provided the biography for Dr. Andy Ammann, Sr.

### ***Questions? Comments?***

*We'd love to hear from you!*

#### **Please contact:**

**Al Stewart**, MI DNR Upland Game Bird Specialist or **Valerie Frawley**, MI DNR Wildlife Technician at 517-373-1263 or at MI DNR, Wildlife Division, PO Box 30444, Lansing, MI, 48909.